



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Pinnacles
National Monument

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Pinnacles National Monument

News Release

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Possible Condor Poisoning

Biologists were alarmed to observe as many as 11 endangered California condors feeding outside the monument on rodents that had been shot with lead ammunition and/or poisoned with rodenticides. National Park Service biologists are now attempting to trap 11 of the monument's 13 condors that were observed feeding on these rodents during the past week.

The monument's Chief of Natural Resources, Denise Louie, explained, "We're going to trap them and field test their blood for lead residues. We will also give them immediate treatment for the rodenticide. If their blood shows high levels of lead, then we'll drive them straight to the Los Angeles Zoo for treatment." Once at the Los Angeles Zoo, veterinarians will x-ray the affected birds to determine if lead fragments are still in their crop. If lead is found, the veterinarians will remove any fragments. The birds will then be held for an extended period while receiving daily shots of a compound (calcium EDTA) that 'collects' lead in the blood and allows the bird to eliminate it from their system. As of yet, no behavioral symptoms of poisoning have been observed, but due to the possibility of ingesting multiple poisons, immediate action must be taken.

In 1987, the last wild California condors were taken to zoos for an intensive captive- breeding program. In 2003, Pinnacles National Monument, a historic breeding area, partnered with the US Fish & Wildlife Service and the Ventana Wildlife Society to become the fifth area to reintroduce California condors. Both captive- breeding efforts and the reintroduction of condors back into the wild have been a great success, raising the overall population of condors from 22 to just under 300 birds. The monument is surrounded by undeveloped ranchland and the local ranching community has shown steady support for the reintroduction program.

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The monument is the most accessible to the public of all the condor release sites, and is the only reintroduction site that invites the public to attend all releases. The reintroduction of such a "signature species" has already begun to increase visitation, and the Pinnacles Condor Program has drawn substantial positive public attention and national press. All partner agencies agree that the reintroduction is succeeding. Biologists have tracked condor flights ranging from northern Santa Clara County to the northern tip of San Luis Obispo County. During an exploratory flight to the Big Sur coast this month, two condors from Pinnacles met with condors from the Big Sur flock for the first time.

As the condors increase their range, they also expose themselves to potential hazards, such as lead poisoning. The consumption of lead fragments occurs when condors feed on animal carcasses that have been shot using lead bullets. Even microscopically small pieces of lead can be fatal for these birds because they become unable to process food when the lead paralyzes their digestive system. The poisoned bird quickly becomes very weak, mentally impaired, and either dies from starvation or is preyed upon by predators. Pinnacles' biologists have been working with the local ranching community and have been largely successful in their efforts to reduce the use of lead ammunition by encouraging the use of non-lead alternatives.

The threat from lead poisoning is precisely why National Park Service biologists monitor condor movement patterns on a daily basis, as well as track them remotely using GPS technology and cameras. Earlier this year Pinnacles began posting photographs on its web page, taken by remote cameras at the monument's feeding site. Now with the CondorCam, <http://www.nps.gov/pinn/condor/condor.htm> visitors can see these birds close up, while researchers use the same photos to gain critical information about the health of each animal.

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General park information can be obtained by visiting www.nps.gov/pinn or by calling 831-389-4485 extension 0.

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